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SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA FIELD TRIP REPORT: AGRICULTURE/FOOD SECURITY
MONITORING IN ZIMBABWE

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SUMMARY

11. From March 1-5, USAID's Southern Africa Principal Regional Advisor for the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) Harlan Hale and USAID/OFDA Zimbabwe Humanitarian Program Specialist Mark Adams conducted field monitoring assessments of agriculture/food security projects in the Matabeleland South and Masvingo Provinces of the country. These projects are led by an association of NGO partners, the Consortium for Southern Africa Food Emergency (C-SAFE), which comprises World Vision, CARE, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Project objectives include improved household food security through conservation of water for productive uses (though water catchment management and small scale irrigation), community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) planning, and the utilization of conservation farming (CF) techniques among drought-affected communities. Despite a delay in program implementation due to the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) suspension on NGO activities during 2008, the project sites visited demonstrated considerable progress and improvement in infrastructure development, beneficiary satisfaction, adoption of CF methodologies, and improved food security of targeted households. USAID/OFDA highlights the importance of this programming as part of its broader agriculture/food security strategy, and notes that, pending USAID/Zimbabwe's transition into an economic growth approach, dam/irrigation system rehabilitation offers robust opportunities for livelihood security and agricultural recovery. END SUMMARY.

CONTEXT and STRATEGY

12. Poor availability and access to appropriate inputs, combined with droughts and/or poor agricultural seasons over the past three years, have adversely affected the overall food security situation in Zimbabwe. Moreover, extension services provided by the GOZ's Ministry of Agriculture have been weakened due to budget

restrictions, lack of mobility and supervision, and the loss of experienced staff. Farmers continue to suffer from the effects of low yields primarily due to late planting, erratic rainfall, and use of low technology. The majority of farmers practice rain-fed subsistence farming and coincide field planting with the onset of the rains. Resource-poor households in the most drought-prone areas are particularly vulnerable to crop failure and food insecurity.

13. USAID/OFDA's C-SAFE programming aims to increase household food security, thereby reducing the necessity of food assistance. By coupling the distribution of appropriate inputs (primarily sorghum and millet for drought-prone areas and legumes for crop rotation) with training in conservation farming (CF) techniques, farmers are more resilient to drought and less dependent upon fertilizer, draught power, and robust rainfall. Conservation farming enhances dry land production, and addresses diminishing returns by retaining scarce water for direct use by plants, promoting soil stability, Qscarce water for direct use by plants, promoting soil stability, improving fertility, and emphasizing timely planting and weeding. These key management practices can contribute to dramatic yield increases, over 100 percent in a single season with greater returns in subsequent seasons. C-SAFE partners utilize a "lead farmer" methodology, whereby small groups receive technical support and guidance from the NGO and lead farmer. Targeted beneficiaries and the broader community are shown the practical benefits of CF via lead farmer "test plots" that compare this methodology to traditional techniques by planting the same crops in an adjacent plot. On NGO-led "field days," community members and GOZ representatives are invited to a lead farmer's homestead to observe the successes of CF and offer prizes to the most succesful CF farmers. Test plots and field days substantially increase awareness of CF techniques, and lead to interest and adoption from the wider community.

14. Conservation farming has been targeted to areas in natural region

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IV and some areas of natural region V where dryland cropping is practiced and yields are inconsistent due to erratic rainfall conditions. However, in some region V areas with sandy soil and very poor rainfall, the benefits of conservation farming are limited. In such areas, scarce water must be efficiently captured and utilized to meet the competing needs of humans, livestock, and agricultural production. The focus of C-SAFE's small dams and irrigation schemes intervention is to improve the efficiency of dams to capture and retain scarce water, and to improve the functionality of these dams for agricultural production and livestock through appropriate irrigation schemes and the construction or repair of livestock troughs. Household livelihood surveys performed by CARE demonstrate that households with access to irrigation from small dams have significantly greater food security and higher incomes.

15. Rehabilitation of dams and irrigation schemes may also serve as a beneficial complement to CF techniques in less drought-prone areas, and C-SAFE partners also provide technical guidance and inputs to these communities. There are a substantial number of dams and irrigation systems throughout the country, initially constructed by government works programs, which have fallen into disrepair. In some instances, minimal infrastructure improvements are needed to resuscitate their functionality.

FIELD VISIT FINDINGS

16. Led by project staff from World Vision and CARE, the USAID/OFDA team travelled to Gwanda and Beitbridge districts within Matabeleland South, and the districts of Chivi and Bikita within Masvingo. The team visited an informative array of project sites, including three community dams in various stages of completion, and a finished dam and irrigation site that is now wholly community-managed. Several CF beneficiaries were visited, including lead farmers who were in their second year of adoption. The size of their home-based plots utilizing CF was indicative of their confidence in the methodology. In conversations, they recalled their experiential learning with the process and related the

ever-increasing number of adopters from the wider community. In addition, members of the extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture are incorporated in the project, have learned alongside CF adopters, and are now better equipped to promote conservation farming in their extension work in the future.

¶7. USAID/OFDA staff was impressed with the overall community participation for building and reconstruction of dam and irrigation schemes. Under the guidance of NGO partners, communities traditionally organize themselves into self-elected management committees and sub-committees that oversee dam and garden initiatives. In some areas, a complimentary livelihoods component is funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). This provides the same beneficiaries training in small-scale savings and lending and microfinance, which enables them to sell surplus vegetables or fish (in areas where the dam water is perennially full or spring-fed) for increased household savings and income. Owing to the recent transition to the U.S. dollar and South African rand, households now have a more stable currency for savings.

¶8. C-SAFE has well-incorporated principles of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into programming, and has guided the establishment of community-level DRR committees. These groups develop context-specific DRR plans, and in Bikita, USAID/OFDA staff visited a community DRR workshop in process. Around the training hut were ward-specific problem and solution trees on the topics of both drought and cholera, and approximately 30 participants were discussing practical elements to reduce their vulnerability to each. For drought, the solutions listed included crop rotation, crop diversity, reforestation, and the importance of a well-planned budget. They further emphasized minimizing erosion/runoff in dam catchment areas in order to prevent a reduction in dam water holding

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capacity. Cholera prevention methods included the burial of rubbish and human waste, the washing of fruits and vegetables with clean water, and having ingredients to prepare sugar-salt solution in the event of severe diarrhea. In the future, these ward-level plans could contribute to the development of a broader, district-wide Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Plan.

¶9. USAID/OFDA staff also met with the GOZ's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Beitbridge Rural District Council (RDC). He commended the work of the C-SAFE partners, and offered thanks to USAID on behalf of his constituents. He requested further and continued assistance, beginning with the recommendation that an inventory be conducted of the district's existing dam infrastructure. The USAID/OFDA Principal Regional Advisor suggested linkages to the Food Agriculture, Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). These like-minded agencies share regional offices in Pretoria, and could conduct the assessment and offer technical and policy inputs that would be instructive for the broader country, should more robust rehabilitation be pursued.

¶10. In Chivi District, the team visited a dam and irrigation site that is now wholly community-managed. The dam was first constructed by the GOZ District Development Fund in 1985, and rehabilitation began in 1998 under the guidance of CARE. Eighty-two households now benefit from a scheme that includes year-round irrigated crops, fruit tree nurseries, livestock watering, and a sand filter for the provision of potable water. Fish are harvested from the dam, beehives have been constructed, the community manages a functioning seed bank, and savings and lending schemes continue to operate. The community oversees the 14 square kilometer water catchment area, and maintains the fencing around the 3.5 hectare garden. CARE support ended in 2003, after a dam breach caused by Cyclone Eline in 2000.

¶11. USAID/Zimbabwe is presently in the process of finalizing its Economic Growth and Development Strategy (EGAD), and recognizes that dam/irrigation system rehabilitation and expansion can provide relatively short-term achievements in livelihood security and agricultural recovery. Further, these interventions could be paired with small-scale lending schemes, and, more broadly, can link to

private sector support mechanisms (contract farming, vegetable markets). The rehabilitation of these dams offer opportunities for employment and vocational training, and, if needed, may be paired with Food for Assets programming in the short-term.

¶12. USAID/OFDA's other, complementary agriculture/food security support includes grants to Holistic Management International, Africare, Action Contre la Faim, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. USAID/OFDA support to the successful C-SAFE programming will likely continue. Consortium partners are presently finalizing detail to submit a cost extension to complete work that was unfinished and delayed by the NGO suspension, and the proposed extension will also enable post-harvest monitoring. The consortium is presently in the process of sharing best practices and lessons learned while conducting impact assessments and comparative site studies.

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